

## IX. APPALACHIA

COMPOSED: 1896, revised 1902

FIRST PERFORMANCE: 1904, Eberfeld, Germany, Hans Hyam, Conductor

TEXT: Negro slave verse

FORCES REQUIRED: Baritone Solo, SATB Chorus, Orchestra

*Appalachia*, we read in a note prefixed to the score, 'is the old Indian name for Northern America. The composition mirrors the moods of tropical nature in the great swamps bordering on the Mississippi River which is so intimately associated with the life of the old negro slave population. Longing melancholy, an intense love of Nature, childlike humour and an innate delight in dancing and singing are still the most characteristic qualities of this race.' Here the deep impression made on Delius by his life in Florida, which colours many of his early works, finds its mature utterance.<sup>1</sup>

Entitled "Variations on an Old Slave Song, with Final Chorus", the work in its revised form consists "of a lengthy introduction, fifteen variations on an old negro folk-song (curiously reminiscent of the first theme of the quartet in the last act of *Rigoletto*) and a choral eqilogue which ends with an echo of the introduction."<sup>2</sup> The theme itself is taken from a Negro Hymn, "No Trouble in that Land Where I'm Bound", which Delius heard the Negroes singing in the tobacco factories, known as "stemmeries" in Danville, Virginia.<sup>3</sup> The melody and text of the Choral eqilogue was supposedly taught to Delius by Elbert Anderson, his Negro overseer at the Florida plantation.<sup>4</sup>

The final version displays considerable revision including the addition of the chorus. Commenting on the original Beecham remarks:

...and toward the close of the year 1895 he had begun his first version of *Appalachia*, to be completed in the early part of 1896. It is quite a modest effort if compared with the splendid achievement of 1902, from which it differs widely in thematic material. Some features there are in common, notably the use of the cow-horn in the Introduction and the tune upon which the variations in the later version are founded, and which here is taken along occasionally at a very spirited tempo. We have also liberal doses of both 'Dixie' and 'Yankee-Doodle', so that the general effect is one of light-hearted gaiety. But compared with the eventual *Appalachia* it is of slight dimensions, the score consisting of less than thirty pages. If the later version were not so well known and remarkable, it might be just possible to give the earlier one a hearing; but on the

whole it may be more judicious to forget that it was ever written.<sup>5</sup>

The destiny of all Delius music in the eyes of the English public was highly influenced by the first performance of the revised *Appalachia* in England, in November of 1907. It was at this moment that the profound communion between Beecham and Delius, conductor and composer, began, thus providing the unceasing support and enthusiasm which Delius's music has enjoyed in England to the present day.

The first performance in England of *Appalachia* is one of the half-dozen momentous occasions I have known over a period of more than fifty years. I am thinking here less of my own personal reaction to the music than that of the very considerable audience assembled to hear it. In a word it was one of the few red-letter days in English music, an occasion that the majority of the Press failed to appreciate. Fortunately it is not those who write about music whose opinions ultimately influence its destinies, and one of the anachronisms of our age is the belief, on the part of old-fashioned editors, that it is still necessary to include among their regular staff men who know very little about the fundamentals of music, who cannot distinguish the merits of one work from another, and who rarely lose the chance of mistaking talent for genius and vice versa. None of this complaint, let me make clear, is directed against those few exceptional men to be found in England, both at that time and today, who were and are a credit to their calling. But undoubtedly it was upon the young and progressive composers of the day, together with those executive musicians capable of recognizing beauty and novelty of sound when they heard it, that the profoundest impression was made.<sup>6</sup>

Beecham continues:

Like every other musician under thirty years of age who was present at the performance of *Appalachia* in November, I was startled and electrified. Here at last was modern music of native growth in which it was possible with uninhibited sincerity to take pride and delight. I formed the unshakeable resolution to play as much of it as I could lay my hands on whenever I had the opportunity, and at once included in my coming programmes for the New Year, *Paris* and *Appalachia*.<sup>7</sup>

I will forgo an entire analysis of *Appalachia* because the majority of the work is wholly orchestral and has been treated by Doreen Grimes in her dissertation on *Form in the Orchestral Works of Frederick Delius*. Instead I will analyze the choral sections and discuss Delius's use of a chorus in such a work.

The choral involvement in *Appalachia* exists in three areas. The first states "little choral doxologies" as Heseltine calls them<sup>8</sup> - brief wordless choral utterances, predominantly by male voices, which enter pianissimo, mysteriously closing several of the variations - 311-313, 369-373, 406-415, 448-451, and 580-584. Their first appearance is almost half way into the work which seems to enhance the haunting mood suggested by the unexpected vocal sonority.

The second area, which begins the choral finale, presents an actual choral variation on the main theme, 535-549, and the third includes the majority of the choral epilogue, with the addition of the baritone soloist, creating the sonorous climax to the entire work in which the final portion of the main theme enters the choral texture.

The main theme on which the variations are based appears in the English horn in 99 after a lengthy introduction, and is basically an eight bar melody divided into a 2+2+4 measure pattern:



The *Rigoletto* excerpt reveals the similarity alluded to by Heseltine:

Duke of Mantua

gliuo-la! bel-la fi-glia del l'a-mo-re, Schia-vo  
son de' vez-zi tuo-i; con un detto, un det-to sol tu  
puo--i le mie pe-ne, le mie pe-ne con-so-lar

The only reference to the variation theme among the choral doxologies occurs with the second one, in 369-371. The third fragment, in 406-415, emulates a general phrase shape and rhythm encountered in several earlier variations.

The actual choral variation presents the theme in an a cappella choral setting, to which Delius has added a six bar climactic extension of impressive vocal sonority. The harmonization is markedly chromatic and the total effect of a cappella texture amid lush orchestral fabric creates an enthralling ambience which Delius was later to use with similar effectiveness in *Sea Drift* and *The Song of the High Hills*.

Close scrutiny of the final choral section reveals interesting subtleties in structure and gives the investigator unusual insights into Delius's compositional procedures. This final section has a certain affinity with the interlude "The Walk to the Paradise Garden" from Delius's opera *A Village Romeo and Juliet*, because both were added later to existing compositions and are thus based on material already found in the original compositions. In the case of *Appalachia* the final choral section was added to the revised version of 1902 and the bulk of its thematic material can be derived from orchestral sections found in both versions of the work.

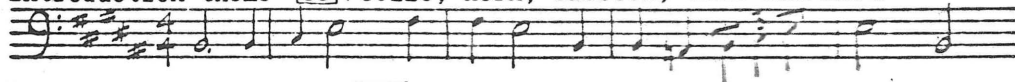
An orchestral interlude, 550-592, separates the choral variation from the choral finale and concludes with an A<sup>b</sup> minor restatement of the original variation theme. In 593 the finale begins with the baritone soloist intoning the verse of the slave song. Delius stipulates in the score that the soloist must be placed in the chorus and not beside the conductor. In 596 the chorus answers in the "call and response" style typical of Negro singing, first with male voices, then female, tenor and soloist, and finally all together, and in 601 the soloist returns with another phrase, concluding this first section of the finale.

In 604 the real climax begins with canonic treatment throughout the chorus of a theme, ① derived from the original orchestral introduction. This instrumental theme heard first in the cello, horns, bass clarinet, and bassoon in 66-70 was also treated canonically with its exposition in the introduction.

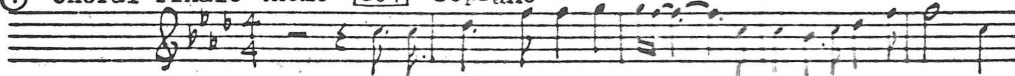
After being passed among all four voices and repeated by the sopranos in 614-618, a second thematic derivation, ②, begins in the soprano in 618. This triplet theme is taken from the 6/8 violin I melody in 147-151, and is stated first by the sopranos in 618-622 and then again in unison by the entire chorus. In the first instance Delius introduces the first half of ① contrapuntally in the entire bass register of the orchestra, and in 620 both themes appear again in the trumpets and horns as a second counterpoint to ② in the sopranos. The greatest contrapuntal complexity occurs in 623-629 when ② appears canonically in the trumpet and unison chorus against the reappearance of the first phrase of the variation theme in the orchestral bass. In 625 ② begins in the treble woodwinds and strings, and in 626 the trumpet and chorus state the final four bars of the variation theme as a counter melody creating the climax of the work on the high C in 627.

*Appalachia* concludes with an echo of the introduction as the opening horn

Introduction theme [66] cello, horn, bassoon, bass clarinet



① choral finale theme [604] soprano



6/8 theme [147] violin I



② [618] soprano



#### FINAL CHORUS:

After night has gone comes the day.  
 The dark shadows will fade away.  
 T'ords the morning lift a voice,  
 Let the scented woods rejoice  
 And echoes swell across the mighty stream.  
 O Honey I am going down the river in the morning.  
 Heigh ho, down the mighty river,  
 Aye! Honey, I'll be gone  
 When next the whippoorwill's a-calling.  
 Don't you be too lonesome, love, and don't you fret and cry;  
 For the dawn will soon be breaking and the radiant morn is nigh,  
 And you'll find me ever a-waiting,  
 Heigh ho!  
 And you'll find me ever a-waiting my own sweet Nelly Gray!  
 T'ords the morning lift a voice,  
 Let the scented woods rejoice  
 And echoes swell across the mighty stream!

motif is heard against chromatic sighing in the chorus.

Delius, according to Heseltine, had given some thought to rewriting the choral epilogue so that the work might be performed at orchestral concerts where no chorus was available. Yet such omissions would seem to rob the work of the essence of its inspiration. The choral epilogue states a human condition from which the original variation melody was derived and with whose interaction Delius was also inspired to write *Koanga*.

In addition the great majority of Delius's mature works, those deemed to be the most significant and praiseworthy, all include some use of chorus. This element had become a necessary part of Delius's compositional vocabulary, manifesting musically the emotional stimulus provided to a great degree by textual import.

Choral presence provides not only a textual/emotional impact, implied here by a slave song, but also a distinct characteristic of Delius's mature compositional style, without which a certain warmth and mystery would certainly be lacking.

## Footnotes

1. Heseltine, p. 124
2. Ibid, p. 124-125
3. Beecham, p. 73
4. John Coveney, Record Jacket, Angel S-36756
5. Beecham, p. 73
6. Ibid, p. 146-147.
7. Ibid, p. 149
8. Heseltine, p. 125